UAE rules out joining Gaza force without clear plan

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates is not planning to join the international stabilisation force for Gaza because it lacks a clear framework, a senior official said on Monday, while US mediators met Israel's prime minister in Jerusalem to plot the next phase of a fragile month-old ceasefire.

"The UAE does not yet see a clear framework for the stability force, and under such circumstances will probably not participate in such a force," Emirati presidential adviser Anwar Gargash told the Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate forum. He added, "The region remains fragile, yet there is reason for cautious optimism."

The force, which US President Donald Trump claimed would be in Gaza "very soon," has been expected to include troops from UAE, Egypt, Qatar and Turkey, although Israeli objections have cast a shadow over Turkish participation.

The International Stabilization Force (ISF), would be authorised to "use all necessary measures" to demilitarise Gaza, protect civilians and aid deliveries, secure Gaza's borders, and support a newly trained Palestinian police force, according to a draft seen by *Reuters*.

Kushner-Netanyahu meeting

Meanwhile, US envoy Jared Kushner meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu centred on solidifying Israeli control and crushing Palestinian resistance.

The two discussed cementing the US-backed plan, which demands the complete disarmament of Hamas, the demilitarisation of Gaza, the permanent removal of the group from any governing role and international stabilisation force's role, Israeli government spokeswoman Shosh Bedrosian confirmed.

"Together the two discussed phase one, which we are currently still in, to bring our remaining hostages, and the future of phase two of this plan, which includes the disarming of Hamas, demilitarising Gaza and ensuring Hamas will have no role in the future of Gaza ever again," Ms Bedrosian said.

Hamas has unequivocally rejected these demands, with officials stating that relinquishing the weapons of the resistance is a red line that will not be crossed.

The plan, brokered by Trump, has been perceived by some as favouring Israeli interests and not adequately addressing Palestinian concerns for peace. At the same time, Netanyahu has vehemently opposed any role for Turkey, a vocal critic of Israeli aggression. —Agencies

DISPLACED Palestinian children sit outside a tent at the Bureij refugee camp in Gaza Strip.—AFP

Sharaa caps turnaround for Syria with Trump meeting at White House

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump hosted Syrian President Ahmed Al Sharaa at the White House on Monday, a visit that capped a stunning year for the fighter-turned-ruler who toppled a long-time leader and has since sought to end Syria's decades of international isolation.

The US president met Sharaa in the first-ever visit by a Syrian head of state to Washington, six months after their first meeting in Saudi Arabia, where Trump announced plans to lift sanctions, and just days after Washington said the former Al Qaeda figure was no longer a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist".

Sharaa arrived at the White House without the fanfare often given to visiting foreign leaders. He entered through a side entrance unseen by reporters instead of through the West Wing's main door where cameras are positioned. Sharaa, 43, took power last year after his fellow fighters launched a lightning offensive from their enclave in Syria's northwest and overthrew Bashar al Assad just days later on Dec 8.

Syria's regional realignment has since moved at a dizzying pace, away from Assad's key allies Iran and Russia, and toward Turkiye, the Gulf and Washington.

Security was expected to be a top focus of Sharaa's meeting with Trump, who in a major policy shift has sought to help Syria's fragile transition.

The US is brokering talks on a possible security pact between Syria and Israel, which remains wary of Sharaa's past. Unconfirmed reports said last week that Washington is planning to establish a military presence at a Damascus airbase.

Syria is also set to join a US-led coalition to fight the militant Islamic State (IS) group, which could be formally announced as soon as this week.

Just hours before the landmark talks, word emerged of two separate IS plots to assassinate Sharaa that had been foiled over the last few months, according to a Syrian security official. The sources said the plots underlined the direct threat Sharaa faces as he tries to consolidate power in a country ruined by 14 years of civil war.

Over the weekend, the Syrian interior ministry launched a nationwide campaign targeting IS cells across the country, arresting more than 70 suspects.

Last hurdle

Days before the meeting, Trump told reporters that "a lot of progress has been made" on Syria.

"I think he's (Sharaa) doing a very good job. It's a tough neighbourhood, and he's a tough guy, but I got along with him very well," Trump said.

After Sharaa and Trump met in Riyadh in May, Trump announced he would lift all sanctions on Syria.

But the toughest measures, known as the Caesar Sanctions Act, require a repeal from Congress. The White House and State Department have publicly backed lifting them before the year ends, but experts say the government shutdown may affect that timeframe.

Sharaa is expected to strongly advocate for a repeal, which will help spur global investment in a country ravaged by 14 years of war and which the World Bank estimates will take more than $200 billion to rebuild.

Several influential members of Congress have called for the lifting of the 2019 Caesar sanctions, passed in response to human rights abuses under Assad. A few of Trump's fellow Republicans want the sanctions to stay in place, but that could change if Trump applies pressure.

Syria's social fabric has been more recently tested. New bouts of sectarian violence left more than 2,500 dead since Assad's fall, deepening civil war wounds and putting into question the new rulers' ability to govern for all Syrians.

Trump's focus on Syria comes as his administration seeks to keep intact a US-brokered Gaza ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas and push forward on his 20-point plan for an end to the two-year-old conflict. Some of the toughest issues remain unresolved.

Sharaa's own turnaround is no less impressive than his country's. He joined Al Qaeda in Iraq around the time of the 2003 invasion and spent years in a US prison there, before returning to Syria to join the resistance against Assad.—Reuters

Trump threatens BBC with $1bn lawsuit over speech edit

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump has threatened the *BBC* with a $1 billion lawsuit over the editing of a speech he gave just before the 2021 US Capitol riots, a source close to the US president's legal team said on Monday.

The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed a *Fox News* report that Trump's letter gave the UK broadcaster a Friday deadline to retract the program and apologize.

A spokesman for Trump's legal team confirmed that a letter had been sent to the *BBC* and accused the company of having "defamed" Trump, but did not give further details.

"The *BBC* defamed President Trump by intentionally and deceitfully editing its documentary in order to try and interfere in the presidential election," the spokesman said in a statement.

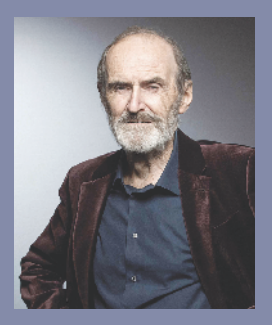
"President Trump will continue to hold accountable those who traffic in lies, deception, and fake news." The director general of the *BBC* announced his resignation on Sunday over the row, after accusations that a documentary by its flagship Panorama program last year had edited a speech by Trump in a misleading way.

The *BBC* said earlier on Monday it would "review" the letter.

The broadcaster also apologized for editing the speech in a way that gave the impression that Republican Trump made "a direct call for violent action" on January 6, 2021.

Trump supporters rioted at the US Capitol on that day in a bid to overturn the certification of his 2020 election defeat by Democrat Joe Biden.—AFP

Bulatov, pillar of Russian art scene, dies at 92



MOSCOW: Erik Bulatov, a pillar of Russia's contemporary art scene known for works mocking Soviet propaganda, has died in Paris at the age of 92, the Russian Academy of Fine Arts said on Monday.

Bulatov was best known as one of the creators of the Sots Art movement that made use of Soviet slogans and shot him to fame in the final years of the USSR.

"One of the founders of Moscow conceptualism and Sots-Art passed away on Sunday in Paris, as confirmed by his wife," an academy spokesperson said.

Bulatov's ironic works contrasted with the serious and dogmatic state-approved art in the Soviet Union.

His most famous work is dubbed Glory to the CSPU — the Communist Party of the Soviet Union — written in large red letters on the backdrop of a clear blue sky.

It was auctioned off in London for $2.2 million in 2008.

Sots Art was inspired by Pop Art, an art movement that used imagery from Western mass culture.

While his ironic art earned him popularity in Moscow intellectual circles, he was largely unknown to a broader audience until shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Bulatov left the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.

He was born in 1933 in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg — known as Sverdlovsk at the time — into a family of staunch communists. Bualatov worked as a children's book illustrator after graduating from art school.

He later formed an art collective called Sretensky Boulevard, part of a wider contemporary art movement opposing official art known as Moscow Conceptualists.

Art was tightly controlled in the USSR, with artists who did not tow the party line remaining underground until some liberalisation in the late Soviet period, when Bulatov's works were exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1988.

This was when he gained international fame and migrated first to New York and then to Paris.—AFP

Media body slams attacks by settlers

JERUSALEM: An organisation representing international media in Israel and the Palestinian territories on Monday condemned attacks by Israeli settlers on journalists in the occupied West Bank, urging Israeli authorities to halt the "violence immediately".

The Foreign Press Association (FPA), which represents hundreds of foreign journalists, said it was "appalled" by the recent attacks, especially during this year's olive harvest.

"Journalists, both local and foreign, have proven to be a clear target as they document an unprecedented level of unchecked violence against Palestinians during this year's olive harvest," the association said, citing two incidents involving journalists from international media outlets.

The FPA said that on Saturday two employees of Reuters wearing clearly marked press vests and helmets were assaulted by masked Israeli civilians armed with clubs and rocks near the Palestinian village of Beita.

"A mob of dozens of settlers beat one of the employees, a female reporter, while she was already on the ground, resulting in severe injuries," the FPA said.

"They also attacked those who tried to help her. A Reuters security person was hit, and two Palestinian freelance journalists were injured while being chased."—AFP

Blast near Red Fort kills 8

Continued from Page 1

explosion happened in that vehicle, and due to the explosion, nearby vehicles were also damaged".

AFP photographers at the site saw pools of blood spattered across the road.

At the city's LNJP hospital, the emergency ward was chaotic as injured people streamed in and doctors rushed to attend to them.

A woman broke down outside the ward where her husband was being treated.

"I can't bear to see him like that," she said, as her brother tried to console her.

Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi said in a statement that the "news of the car explosion near Delhi's Red Fort Metro Station is extremely heartbreaking".

The blaze engulfed at least six cars and several motorised rickshaw taxis.

The nearby hospital building was cordoned off amid a heavy police deployment as officers moved through the corridors.

Outside, anxious relatives gathered after hearing that their loved ones had been brought in.

Musarrat Ansari said her brother was injured after a burning car hit the motorbike he was riding.

"He called me and said his leg was hurt — he couldn't walk," she told AFP.

The Red Fort, which was completed under Moghul rule in 1648, is one of India's most well-known landmarks.

Indian prime ministers address the nation from its ramparts on Independence Day, and it features on the largest banknote.— AFP

Iran mocks US claim on plot to kill Israeli envoy

TEHRAN: Iran has dismissed accusations by the United States that Tehran had attempted to kill the Israeli ambassador in Mexico, describing the claim as "absurd".

"We found this claim very ridiculous and absurd," said foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei during a weekly press briefing on Monday, adding that it was part of an attempt "to destroy Iran's friendly relations with other countries".

Mexico's foreign ministry said it had "received no information" on the alleged plot, and Iran's embassy in Mexico called it "a great big lie".

A US official alleged on Friday that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps elite Quds Force had "initiated the plot" late last year and that it was disrupted earlier this year. "The entire matter was fabricated," Baqaei said.

In mid-June, Israel launched an unprecedented bombing campaign against Iran, triggering a 12-day war during which the US briefly joined with strikes on Iranian nuclear sites.

A ceasefire between Iran and Israel has been in place since June 24.—AFP

Petrol bomb attacks rock B'desh capital

DHAKA: Attackers in Bangladesh set off seven crude petrol bombs on Monday across the capital Dhaka, including striking a building linked to interim leader Muhammad Yunus, causing no injuries, police said.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police said they had arrested a 28-year-old man in connection with "a series" of attacks. Police identified him as a member of the student wing of the outlawed Awami League, the former ruling party of Sheikh Hasina, whose autocratic government was ousted in a deadly uprising in August 2024.

The suspect is "being interrogated regarding multiple incidents", police said in a statement.

Those attacks include petrol bombs hurled overnight on Friday at St Mary's Cathedral and a Catholic school in Dhaka, which also resulted in no injuries.

More petrol bombs early on Monday targeted the offices of Grameen Bank, the pioneering microfinance institution of Nobel Prize-winning Yunus, who took the helm after Hasina was overthrown.

Other targets were a business property linked to Farida Akhtar, a member of Yunus' cabinet, as well as two buses and a hospital.

The latest incidents add to soaring tensions in Bangladesh as parties gear up for the first elections since Hasina's fall, expected in February 2026.

Security forces have "intensified a citywide manhunt to apprehend all individuals involved in these heinous and cowardly acts of violence", police said.

Election campaigns, which began in early November, have been marred by violence.

One person was shot dead at a campaign rally on Wednesday, and two other people, including a candidate, were wounded.

Bangladesh has seen a spate of political and mob killings, while police have offered rewards for the surrender of more than 1,300 firearms — including machine guns, rifles, and pistols — looted during last year's unrest.

Mushfiqua Islam, a 32-year-old university teacher in Dhaka, said he feared the country was "moving ahead without a direction".

"We had some bitter experiences before, and now I am afraid whether I will be a victim."—AFP

When rivers swallow land: Bangladesh's endless battle with erosion

KURIGRAM: On an overcast morning, Nurun Nabi loads bamboo poles and tin sheets onto a wooden boat. His home, built just a year ago on a fragile island in the Brahmaputra River, is on the verge of being swallowed by water.

It is the second time the farmer and father of four has had to move in a year.

"The river is coming closer every day," Nabi said, his voice tight with exhaustion. "We are born to suffer. Our struggle is never-ending. I've lost count of how many times the river took my home." Nabi, 50, has no choice but to move to another char — a temporary island formed by river sediment. His rice and lentil fields are already gone, claimed by the advancing current of the Brahmaputra, which originates in the Himalayas and flows through China and India before reaching Bangladesh.

"I don't know what awaits us there in the new home," he said, looking towards the wide brown river. "If I'm lucky, maybe a few years. If not, maybe a month. This is our life."

Every year, hundreds of families in northern Bangladesh's Kurigram district face the same fate. As riverbanks collapse, people lose not only their homes but also their land, crops, and livestock. The Brahmaputra, Teesta, and Dharla rivers, once lifelines for millions, have become unpredictable, eroding land faster than ever before.

The chars, sandy, shifting islands scattered across the country's northern plains, are among the most fragile places in Bangladesh. Families rebuild again and again, only for the river to take everything they have.

"The water comes without warning," said Habibur Rahman, a 70-year-old farmer who has lived on several chars. "You go to sleep at night, and by dawn, the riverbank has moved. You wake up homeless. There is no peace in our lives." As the world's eyes turn to Brazil, the host of the U.N. climate summit from November 10 to 21, Bangladesh's struggle offers a sobering message for global leaders. The country is often praised as a model of resilience, building embankments, improving flood forecasting, and pioneering community-based adaptation. But without stronger international support and climate finance, those efforts will fall short.

"People here are paying the price for emissions they never made," said Ainun Nishat, a water resource and climate change specialist. "If COP30 means anything, it must deliver real funding for loss and damage and help vulnerable nations like ours protect lives and land before it's too late."

Scientists say what is happening in Kurigram is climate change made visible, as the melting of the Himalayan glaciers that feed the Brahmaputra and Teesta rivers accelerates.

"We are seeing rapid glacial melt, almost double the rate of the 1990s. Extra water is flowing downstream, adding to already swollen rivers," said Nishat, the climate change specialist.

At the same time, the monsoon has grown more erratic, arriving earlier, lasting longer, and falling in intense, sudden bursts. "The rhythm of the seasons has changed," Nishat said. "When it rains, it rains too much, and when it stops, there are often droughts. This instability is making erosion and floods far worse." He added that Bangladesh contributes less than half a percent of global carbon emissions, yet suffers some of the most serious consequences of climate change.

The World Bank estimates one in every seven Bangladeshis could be displaced by climate-related disasters by 2050.

For Kosim Uddin, 50, a father of seven, moving has become routine. "In my life, the river has taken my home 30 or 35 timesmaybe more," he said.

"Every time we rebuild, the river comes again," Uddin said, his eyes fixed on the water. "But where can we go? The whole world is water now." Women carry much of the burden of the constant displacement. Shahina Begum, 30, a mother of two, recalled standing in waist-deep water as she cooked for her family during floods last year. "We moved six times in 10 years," she said. "Every time we start again, the river takes it back." For Shahina, each move brings new hardships. "It is even more difficult for women and adolescent girls," she said. "We have to find dry ground, cook, take care of children, and there is no privacy or safety."

On Kheyar Alga Char, about 300 families have managed to stay put for three years after local groups installed geobags, large sand-filled sacks that strengthen riverbanks against erosion.

"Geobags have made a huge difference," said Johurul Islam, 39, who lost his home more than 10 times before settling here. "For the last three years, the river didn't take our land. For the first time, I feel a little confident about the future." Local NGOs are also helping to build raised villages — clusters of homes elevated above the ground to withstand seasonal floods.

Standing by the riverbank that has held firm for three years, Islam struck a note of cautious optimism.

"Maybe the river will come again one day," he said, smiling faintly. Around him, children played on solid ground, their laughter carried by the evening wind. "This time, we'll be ready. For now, the land is holding and so are we."—Reuters